

# A RED CROSS FLAG THAT SAVED FOUR THOUSAND.

A Narrative by Diġran Andreasian.

Rendered into English by Stephen Trowbridge.

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FROM the day that Turkey entered the war there had been much anxiety among the people of Zeitoun as to whether the Turks would treat the Armenians of those mountain districts with some new form of cruelty and oppression. Zeitoun is—we must now say *was*—a city of ten thousand inhabitants, entirely Armenian, and surrounded by many villages also Christian, in the heart of the Taurus Mountains.

I have been serving for one year as the pastor of the Armenian Protestant Church in Zeitoun, and the narrative which follows is one of personal experience.

Early in the spring of this year the Government began to assume a threatening attitude toward Zeitoun, summoning the elders and notables of the city and commencing an inquisition with the punishment of the bastinado. Absurd and impossible charges were made against the Armenians for the purpose of extorting money. Meanwhile some 6,000 regular troops were quartered in the barracks above the city. An attempt to take the Armenian monastery by storm cost the Turks some casualties and failed of its object. The young men who were within stoutly defended themselves, and even when attacked by field artillery the monastery was not taken.

Fifty of the leading men in Zeitoan were therefore summoned to the barracks "for a conference with the commander." They were at once imprisoned and their families were sent for. Everyone waited anxiously for these people to return, but after a while it was learned that they had been sent away to an unknown destination. A few days later another and larger group of families were ordered to the barracks, and were forthwith driven off with threats and curses to a distant banishment. In this way three or four hundred families at a time were sent off on foot, with no proper supply of food, by devious routes through the mountains, some northwest toward Konia, some southeast toward the hot and unhealthy plains of Mesopotamia.

Day by day we saw the various quarters of the city stripped of the inhabitants, until at last a single neighborhood remained. In addition to my duties as pastor I happened to be in charge of the Mission orphanage. The Commanding Officer sent for me one morning and told me to make ready at once for departure. "Your wife is also to go," he said, "and the children in the orphanage." We made our preparations hurriedly, for we were allowed to take but little with us. As we were leaving I looked back with an aching heart and saw our beloved church empty and lonely. The last company of our ten thousand people was streaming down the valley into banishment! We had seen massacres, but we had never seen this before! A massacre at least ends quickly, but this prolonged anguish of soul is almost beyond endurance.

The first day's march exhausted all of us. In the dark, as we lay down upon the open ground, Turkish muleteers came and robbed us of the few donkeys and mules that we had. Next day in forlorn condition, the

children with swollen and blistered feet, we reached Marash. Through the earnest request of the American missionaries, an order was secured from the governor for my wife and myself to return to my home town. Yoghonolook, near the sea, twelve miles west of Antioch. The governor granted this permit on the ground that my wife and I were not natives of Zeitoun. My heart was torn between the desire to share banishment with some fragment of my congregation and the desire to take my wife to a place of comparative safety in my father's home. But the order having once been issued, I had no alternative but to obey.

At Aintab we found the large Armenian community in the utmost anxiety, but at that time the order to leave had not arrived. Rumors reached us that the villages by the sea were being threatened, but we thought best to continue southward, difficult though the journey was at such a time.

The last part of our way lay through a historic valley, the fertile plain of Antioch. It was here that Chrysostom preached in the fervor of his early ministry before he was called to Byzantium. And it was to a secluded chapel on our own mountain side that he used to withdraw for prayer and communion with God. As a boy I had often looked with wonder and reverence at the massive stones of the ruins of St. Chrysostom's Chapel. It was in this very Antioch that Barnabas and Paul labored with such spiritual energy. And here they set forth upon their momentous task of spreading the Christian faith. The Roman road by which they walked from Antioch to Seleucia can still be traced in the valley below my native town, and the stone piers from which Roman ships set sail at Seleucia are not entirely demolished by the storms and earthquakes of the centuries.

The city of Antioch, once so gallantly defended by the Crusaders, has long been under the rule of the Turks, and the minarets of Islam are ten times more numerous than the church belfries. In April 1909 the Protestant and Gregorian congregations suffered one of the most cruel persecutions in history.

The people of my own home town, Yoghonolook, are simple, industrious folk. For years past their chief occupation has been the sawing and polishing by hand of combs from hard wood and bone. Many of our men are also expert wood carvers. In the neighboring villages the chief occupations are the culture of silk worms for producing raw silk, and the weaving of silk by hand looms into handkerchiefs and scarfs. Our people are very fond of their churches, and since the opening of schools by the American missionaries most of our children have learned to read. Every home is surrounded by mulberry trees, and many beautiful orchards cover the terraced slopes toward the south and west. Travellers who have been to Southern Italy tell us that the villages near Naples very much resemble ours. The broad, rough back of Mousa Dagħ (*i.e.* Mount Moses), adjoining Jebel-el-Ahmar, rises up east of us. Every gorge and crag of our beloved mountain is known to our boys and men.

I mention these facts about my village home so that you may feel something of the quiet happy life which was so rudely and so completely broken up by this last attempt of the Turks to exterminate our race.

Eighteen days after I had reached home an official order from the Turkish Government at Antioch was served upon the six villages of Mousa Dagħ to prepare for banishment within seven days. You can scarcely imagine the consternation and the indignation which

this order caused. We sat up all night debating what it would be best to do. To resist the forces of the Turkish Government seemed almost hopeless, and yet the scattering of families into a distant wilderness raided by fanatical and lawless Arab tribes, seemed such an appalling prospect that the inclination of both men and women was to refuse the summons and withstand the anger of the Government. All, however, were not of this mind. Rev. Haroutune Nokhoudian, the pastor of the Protestant Church in Beytias, for example, came to the conviction that it would be folly to resist, and that the severity of banishment might possibly be modified in some way. He was in favor of yielding. Sixty families from his own village and a considerable number from the next village agreeing with him, separated themselves from us and went down to Antioch under Turkish guards. They were shortly expelled in the direction of the lower Euphrates. (We have lost all track of them now and may never hear of them again).

Our firm friends, the American missionaries, were cut off from us 120 miles to the north at Aintab. Communications with the outside world being practically severed, we were thrown upon our own resources, and we realized that our one hope was in the mercy of God. Fervently we prayed that He would strengthen us to do our duty.

Knowing that it would be impossible to defend our villages in the foothills, it was resolved to withdraw to the heights of Mousa Dag, taking with us as large a supply of food and implements as it was possible to carry. All the flocks of sheep and goats were also driven up the mountain side, and every available weapon of defense was brought out and furbished up. We found that we had a hundred and twenty modern rifles and

shot-guns, with perhaps three times that number of old flint-locks and horse-pistols. That still left more than half our men without weapons.

It was very hard to leave our homes and to see our churches and schools deserted. But we had hopes that possibly while we were fighting off the Turks, the Dardanelles might be forced and deliverance come to the country.

By nightfall the third day we had reached the upper crags of the mountain. At dawn next morning all hands went to work digging trenches at the most strategic points in the ascent of the mountain. Where there was no earth for trench-digging, rocks were rolled together, making strong barricades behind which groups of our sharp-shooters were stationed. The sun came out gloriously, and we were hard at it all day strengthening our position against the attack which we knew was certain to come.

Toward evening we held a mass meeting for the election of a Committee of Defense which should have supreme authority for our six communities. Some favored an election by show of hands, but others argued that as this was a matter of such vital importance the regular Congregational method of choice by secret ballot should be followed. And they offered to get together enough bits of paper to carry out the ballot! Our people have become very much attached to these democratic methods taught by the missionaries. Without much delay scraps of paper, more or less torn and wet, were gathered and the ballot was cast. A governing council thus being established, plans were at once made for defending each pass in the mountain and each approach to the camp. Scouts, messengers, and a central reserve group of sharp-shooters were chosen and were assigned their duties.

The summons from the government had been served July 30th. The seven days' grace had now almost elapsed, and we were aware that the Turks must have discovered our movements. The whole Antioch plain is peopled with Turks and Arabs, and there is always a strong military garrison in the Antioch barracks.

On August 5th the attack began. The advance guard was two hundred regulars, and their captain insolently boasted that he would clear the mountain in one day. But the Turks suffered several casualties and were driven back to the base. As we were preparing to camp and to cook the evening meal, a pouring rain set in and continued all night. For this we were ill prepared. There had not been time to make huts of branches, nor had we any tents or waterproof clothing. Men, women, and children, somewhat over five thousand in all, were soaked to the skin, and much of the bread we had brought with us was turned into a pulpy mass. We were especially solicitous to keep our powder and rifles dry. This the men managed to do very well.

When the Turks advanced for a more general attack, they dragged up two field guns which, after some experimentation, secured the range and wrought havoc in our camp. One of our sharp-shooters, a lion-hearted young fellow, crept down through the brushwood and among the rocks until he was in very close range of the field guns which were mounted on a flat rock. Having made himself an ambush of branches, he watched for a good opportunity. He was so near that he could hear the Turks talking to one another as they loaded the guns. Then as one gunner stepped out into view, the young man picked him off with the first shot. With five bullets he killed four gunners! The captain thereupon threw up his hands in dismay, and not being able to discern our sharp-shooter

ordered the guns to be dragged to a place of shelter. Thus were we saved from a disastrous gun fire on that day and several days to come.

But the Turks were gathering forces for a massed attack. They had sent word through many Moslem villages calling the people to arms. Army rifles and plentiful ammunition were handed out from the Antioch arsenal, until the mob of four thousand Moslems thirsting for massacre became a formidable foe. But the chief strength of the Turks was in the three thousand regular troops accustomed to discipline and inured to hardship.

Suddenly one morning our scouts brought word to headquarters that the enemy was appearing at every pass in the mountain. Here and there the Turks had already gained the cliffs and shoulders of the crest. Our reserve body of defenders was—very unwisely, as we afterwards realized—sent in small groups to these various points. No sooner had our forces been thus divided than a massed attack in great force commenced through one ravine. All the other advances had been feints and were not followed up. By the time our men discovered the situation and rallied from distant points, the Turks had shot down our scouts and had poured through an important pass. To our dismay we saw them already in full occupation of high ground, threatening our camp. Reinforcements kept pushing up the mountain, and as the afternoon drew on we saw that we were completely outnumbered. We saw also that the range of the Turks' rifles was far superior to that of our old-fashioned firearms. By sundown the enemy had advanced three companies through the dense underbrush and forest to within four hundred yards of our huts. A deep damp ravine lay between, and the Turks decided to bivouac rather than to push on in the darkness.





1. ONE OF THE FRENCH CRUISERS.

2. THE IMPROVISED RAFT IN THE SURF, FROM WHICH THE EMBARKATION WAS MADE.



A FAMILY COOKING THE EVENING MEAL IN THE CAMP AT PORT SAID.



SOME OF THE 628 RESCUED BOYS.



A MOTHER AND HER TWO CHILDREN.

Our leaders hurriedly took counsel together, whispering very quietly and not allowing any light in camp. Everyone knew that a crisis had been reached. Finally a venturesome plan was adopted: to creep around the Turkish positions in the dead of night and thus carry out an enveloping movement, closing in very suddenly with a fusillade and ending with a hand to hand encounter. If this plan should fail, we knew that everything was lost. Through the dark wet woods our men crept with extraordinary skill. It was here that our familiarity with those crags and thickets made it possible to do what invaders could not attempt. The circle was practically completed when, with a flash and a crash on all sides, our men delivered their attack, rushing forward with desperate courage.

In a very few moments it was evident that bewilderment and alarm had thrown the Turkish camp into the utmost confusion. Troops were rushing hither and thither in the black night, stumbling over rocks and logs, officers shouting contradictory commands and struggling vainly to rally their men. Evidently the impression was given of a very substantial Armenian attack, because in less than half an hour the Turkish colonel gave the order to retreat, and before dawn the woods were practically clear of the troops. More than two hundred Turks had been killed and some booty taken: seven Mauser rifles, 2,500 rounds of ammunition and one mule. There was no sign of any renewal of fighting. But we knew that our foes were not defeated: they were only driven off.

During the next few days they roused the whole Mohammedan population for many miles around—a horde of perhaps 8,000. With this larger number they were able to surround and lay siege to Mousa Dagħ on

the landward side. Their plan was to starve us out. On the seaward side there was no harbor nor any communication with a seaport; the mountain sloped directly into the sea. We were fully occupied in the care of our wounded and the reparation of the damage done in camp. Special meetings were held to thank God for deliverance thus far, and to intercede with him for our families and little ones. Gregorians and Protestants were fused into one faith and fellowship by this baptism of suffering.

When we discovered that our mountain was in a state of siege, we began to estimate our food resources. During the first week on the heights we had exhausted the bread, potatoes and cheese that we had brought from home. Very few had been able to bring flour or other cereals, so for a month past we had been living on our flocks, using the goats' milk for the little children and the sick, and slaughtering a number of sheep and goats every day. This constant meat diet was not good for us, but on the other hand we were profoundly thankful that we were spared the suffering of starvation. We made a careful count of the flocks and found that even with a reduced ration of meat our supply would last not more than two weeks longer. From the first we had been thinking of plans for escape by sea.

Before the seige had entirely closed in, we had sent a runner to make the dangerous trip eighty-five miles through Turkish villages to Aleppo, the capital of the province, with an appeal to the American Consul, Mr. Jackson, to send us help by sea if possible. But it is not at all likely that our runner ever reached Aleppo. It occurred to us that possibly a battleship of the Allies might be in Alexandretta harbor, thirty-five miles to the north. So one of our

young men who was a strong swimmer volunteered to creep through the Turkish lines and take a message in English strapped inside his belt. He succeeded in reaching the hills overlooking the harbor, but saw that there was no battleship and returned. His plan had been to swim out to sea, circling around to reach the battleship, thus avoiding the Turkish sentries on the roads leading in to Alexandretta.

We then prepared triplicate copies of the following appeal and appointed three swimmers to be constantly on the watch for any passing ship, to strike through the surf and swim out at an angle so as to meet the vessel:—

“To any English, American, French, Italian or Russian admiral, captain or authority whom this petition may find; we appeal in the name of God and human brotherhood.

We, the people of six Armenian villages, about 5,000 souls in all, have withdrawn to that part of Mousa Dagħ called Damlajik, which is three hours journey northwest from Suediye along the seacoast.

We have taken refuge here from Turkish barbarism and torture, and most of all from the outraging of the honor of our women.

Sir, you must have heard about the policy of annihilation which the Turks are applying to our nation. Under cover of dispersing the Armenians as if to avoid rebellion, our people are expelled from their houses, deprived of their gardens, their vineyards, and all their possessions.

This brutal program has already been applied to the city of Zeitoun and its thirty-two villages, to Albustan, Geoksun, Yarpouz, Gurin, Diarbekir, Adana, Tarsus, Mersin, Deort Yol, Hadjin, etc. And the same policy is being extended to all the

one and a half million Armenians in different parts of Turkey.

The present writer was the Protestant pastor in Zeitoun a few months ago and was an eyewitness of many unspeakable cruelties. I saw families of eight or ten members driven along the highway, bare-footed children six and seven years old by the side of aged grandparents, hungry and thirsty, their feet swollen from the toilsome journey. Along the road one heard sobs and curses and prayers. Under the pressure of great fear, some mothers gave birth to children in the bushes by the side of the road. Immediately afterward they were compelled by the Turkish guards to continue their journey till kind death arrived to give an end to their torture.

The remainder of the people who were strong enough to bear the hardships of the march were driven on under the whips of gendarmes to the plains of the south. Some died of hunger. Others were robbed along the way. Others were stricken by malaria and had to be left by the roadside. And as a last act of this dark and foul tragedy the Arabs and Turks massacred all the males and distributed the widows and girls among their tribes.

The Government some thirty-five days ago informed us that our six villages must go into exile. Rather than submit to this we withdrew to this mountain. We have now little food left, and the troops are besieging us. We have had five fierce battles. God has given us the victory, but the next time we will have to withstand a much larger force.

Sir, we appeal to you in the name of Christ!

Transport us, we pray you, to Cyprus or any other free land. Our people are not indolent; we



will earn our own bread if we are employed.

If this is too much to grant, transport at least our women, old people and children, equip us with sufficient arms, ammunition and food, and we will work with you with all our might against the Turkish forces. Please, Sir, do not wait until it is too late!

Respectfully your servant, for all the Christians here,

*September 2*

Dikran Andreasian."

But days passed and not even a sail was seen. The war had reduced the coastwise shipping to a minimum. Meanwhile at my suggestion our women had been making two immense flags, on one of which I printed in large, clear English, "CHRISTIANS IN DISTRESS: RESCUE." This was a white flag with colored lettering, hastily embroidered by the women. The other made by my sister Iskouhee was also white with a large red cross at the center. We fastened these flags to tall saplings and set a watch at the foot to scan the horizon from dawn to dark. Some days we had rain and on others heavy mists and fogs, which are rather prevalent along our coast.

The Turks again attacked us by several approaches, and we had some severe fighting, but never at such close quarters as during the first general engagement. From one point of vantage we were able to roll boulders down the precipitous mountain side with disastrous effects to the enemy. Our powder and cartridges were running low, and the Turks evidently had some idea of the straits we were in, for they began shouting insolent summons to surrender. Those were anxious days and long nights! It was at this time that my wife was confined and gave birth to her first child, a son. She suffered much in the flight down the seaward trail two days later, but I carried her and helped her as much as

possible. Thank God, she is in good health now and so is our little son.

One Sunday morning, the thirty-sixth day of our defense, while I was occupied in preparing a brief sermon to encourage and strengthen our people, I was startled by hearing a man shouting at the top of his voice. He came racing through our encampment straight for my hut. "Pastor, pastor," he exclaimed, "a battleship is coming and has answered our waving!—Thank God!—Our prayers are heard. When we wave the Red Cross flag the battleship answers by waving signal flags. They see us and are coming in nearer shore!"

This proved to be the French cruiser "Guichen," a four-funnel ship. While one of its boats was being lowered, some of our young men raced down to the shore and were soon swimming out to the stately vessel which seemed to have been sent to us from God! With beating hearts we hurried down to the beach and soon an invitation came from the Captain for a delegation to come on board and narrate the situation. He sent a wireless to the Admiral of the fleet and before a great while the flag-ship "Ste. Jeanne d'Arc" appeared on the horizon followed by other French battleships. The Admiral spoke words of comfort and cheer to us, and gave an order that every soul of our community should be taken on board the ships. The embarkation took some time and was exceedingly difficult on account of the roughness of the coast. We had to climb out over improvised rafts to get through the roaring surf to the ships' boats. We were taken on board four French cruisers and one English, and were very kindly cared for. In two days we arrived at Port Said, Egypt, and are now settled in a permanent camp which has been provided for us by the British authorities.

We are especially grateful to Mr. William C. Hornblower for the excellent organization of this camp, and to Col. and Mrs. P. G. Elgood and Miss Russell for their great kindness and untiring efforts on our behalf.

The Armenian Red Cross Society of Cairo, recently organized, of which the Gregorian Bishop is Honorary Chairman, Mr. Fermanian, Director, and Prof. Kayayan, Secretary, has sent us a staff of three doctors and three nurses.

An accurate census has been taken which shows that the survivors number:—

427	babies and children under four years of age
508	girls from 4 to 14
628	boys from 4 to 14
1,441	women above 14 years of age
1,054	men above 14
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4,058	total number of souls rescued.

After the Turks' first challenge, July 30th, we defended ourselves on Mousa Dagh forty-four days; and a two days' voyage brought us to Port Said on September 14th.

We do not forget that our Saviour was brought in His infancy to Egypt for safety and shelter. And the brethren of Joseph could not have been more grateful than we are for the corn and wheat provided.

With greetings to American, British, French and Armenian friends, in the name of Christ under the shadow of Whose Red Cross we are indeed one people.

Respectfully yours,

DIKRAN ANDREASIAN.

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Cairo.

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Copies of this narrative may be had free of charge  
by application to the Secretary.

There are many urgent needs, such as milk and  
proper food for the babies and the sick; towels and  
soap; bedding and clothing for the winter, especially  
for the women and children; mattresses, hospital sheds, etc.  
Supplies and tools for beginning industrial work will  
need to be purchased. Remittances may be sent to the  
Treasurer; other communications to the Secretary.

